



# Commissioner's Comments

by Stephen L. Pruitt, Ph.D.  
Kentucky Commissioner of Education

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*First, thanks for the warm welcome to Kentucky.*

*Though today is my first official day on the job, as you can imagine it is a day filled with paperwork, orientation, meeting staff and others and getting the lay of the land at the Kentucky Department of Education. So, I have reached out to Associate Commissioner Amanda Ellis, who is in charge of the Office of Next-Generation Learners, to pen this week's blog. I understand all of the other associates have done so in recent weeks, and I didn't want her to miss the opportunity. The topic is one that will be critical to our success as we move forward. It focuses on efforts to close achievement gaps by reducing the number of novice learners. However, it should be understood that efforts focus not only on those who are performing at the lowest level, but ALL children and how every child can improve his or her academic performance.*

*I look forward in the coming weeks to carrying on the tradition of the commissioner's blog by sharing my thoughts on various topics I encounter as part of the job as Kentucky's Commissioner of Education.*

*Stephen L. Pruitt, Ph.D.  
Commissioner of Education*

## **Reflection on teaching practices key to novice reduction**

*Every child is proficient and prepared for success via a personalized system of education that prepares each child for life, work and citizenship in the 21st century.*

### **Kentucky Department of Education Vision**

How do Kentucky educators ensure proficiency and successfully prepare all students for the future when 22 percent of students assessed in reading and mathematics in the Commonwealth are currently performing at the novice level?

We often want to react with the development of additional policies and regulations. This strategy has led to more than 40 regulations and statutes that require plans and steps toward addressing the issue. Purchasing programs or implementing a new initiative often catches educator focus as a quick remedy to a complex problem. But program solutions can lead to a large monetary and human resource investment that can't be sustained over time. Further, we know attempts to increase requirements and seek a single solution for everyone is not facilitating an increase in student growth. Therefore, what really is necessary for all students to have the opportunity to grow and succeed?

The Novice Reduction Plan for Gap Closure requires districts and schools to dive deeply into the fundamental components of daily instruction for ALL students. As educators, we often overlook the opportunity to continuously evaluate and improve our daily practices. Seeking additional interventions

and outside support for struggling students may overshadow the importance of improving the quality of core instruction students receive daily. Where do we begin?

DuFour and Eaker (1998) posed four important questions for Professional Learning Communities to consider:

1. What is it we expect our students to learn?
2. How will we know when they have learned it?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn?
4. How will we respond when some students already know it?

Staff at the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has identified four main categories that encompass the key work processes essential for quality instruction.

- [Standards and Curriculum Support](#)
- [Instruction](#)
- [Continuous Improvement and Assessment](#)
- [Environment and Support](#)

The four identified categories are not new concepts, rather they are foundational requirements that should be evident in daily instruction. These categories align with the Characteristics of Highly Effective Teaching and Learning as well as the Framework for Teaching. KDE staff has reviewed trainings, resources and results identifying specific practices that will help districts and schools focus on excellent instruction. The result is a revised website of resources called [Novice Reduction for Gap Closure](#). The website provides guidance in conducting a self-assessment in each of the categories. A 30-60-90 day plan for implementing and monitoring the identified strategies is also available to assist in driving intentional actions and implementation timelines. Regional field coaches are ready to provide assistance in the development of plans to increase student achievement and decrease novice performance. Additionally, [Novice Reduction Regional Workshops](#) will support district and school efforts to improve instruction and reduce novice.

Kentucky educators want to help all students be successful in the 21st century. To do that, it is essential that educators reflect on and continuously improve their current practices. This is challenging and difficult work, but KDE staff stand behind and beside each of the Commonwealth's teachers in their efforts to improve instruction.